Response by Perry Anderson

Let me begin by thanking the editors of *Diplomatic History* for arranging this symposium, Anders Stephanson for his careful account of the essay that is its principal focus, and the scholars who have set out their critical reactions to "Imperium" and its companion text "Consilium." It is a pleasure to respond to them. Across the spectrum of comment, three general questions arise, each with a subdivision of particular points at issue. These concern, respectively, the domestic drivers of U.S. foreign policy, its external antagonists, and its overall trajectory and balance sheet. Let me say something briefly about each.

In different ways, Melvyn Leffler, Wilson Miscamble, and David Milne all tax me—the first two severely, the last mildly—with a familiar economic determinism, tributary to the Wisconsin School of diplomatic historians: a legacy too one-eyed for Milne and Leffler, altogether disreputable for Miscamble. I should say at the outset that I do not regard association with the Wisconsin tradition as in any way a reproach, given the high regard in which I hold it. But it is a misconception to identify me with it. This is not simply because, as Andrew Bacevich notes, I place the originating matrix of American foreign policy in a set of coordinates encompassing the distinctive geography, ideology, and polity of the "first new nation," as well as its economy. More pointedly, it is also because I explicitly depart from the belief that the Open Door can be taken as an open sesame to continuities of U.S. diplomacy. In that regard, as I explain and Stephanson notes, my intellectual debt is to its conservative and liberal critics, Robert Tucker and John Thompson, rather than to its adherents (pp. 38–39). How sharply the resulting analysis breaks with any variant of economism, can be seen from my verdict on American entry into the First World War, which—ironically, in this respect—is a source of pained indignation for Miscamble and Leffler. That it answered to no determinable material interest of the country can scarcely be disputed. Admirers of Wilson are obliged to fall back on the tropes of Entente ideology—Germany's deadly war aims, as if these extended to the New World, and the nightmare of Hun domination of the Old World—that are the staple of British patriotic legend, but have no bearing beyond it. The reality is that the Great War was a disaster of liberal civilization that sprang from the imperial rivalries of the major European powers, in which the United States had no significant stake. As Niall Ferguson has cogently argued, without British intervention a swift German victory along Franco–Prussian lines in 1914

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would have been preferable to the catastrophe that four years of mutual slaughter, rounded off by Versailles, inflicted on the continent, leading to the rise of Hitler.[1] American intervention merely precluded any chance of a peace of exhaustion, rather than retribution.

Miscamble writes of "muddled domestic politics" informing U.S. diplomacy after the closure of Wilson's presidency, a formulation with which I have no reason to disagree, treating its interwar initiatives as by and large ad hoc and inconsequential. A coherent vision of America's role in the world did not begin to crystallize until some time had elapsed after Pearl Harbor. For his imaginative grasp of the degree of change that occurred in the last two to three years of Roosevelt's life, I saluted Franz Schurmann. To note, as I did, that he overstated his case, and that much remained to be worked out under Truman, is not to backtrack but simply to register that, as often happens in scholarship, a powerful insight can outrun its evidence, without ceasing to command our admiration. The debate that Schurmann's work generated in the seventies—William Appleman Williams and Bruce Cumings both produced striking critical reflections on *The Logic of World Power*—was of an intellectual quality we might well envy today.[2] Schurmann was not a historian, but in the work of Gabriel Kolko, who was, we can see how far wartime planners in Washington had, for the first time, moved towards a vision of American global hegemony as he construed it.

It is at this point, before the onset of the Cold War, that—in taking the dynamic of U.S. capitalism as the framing condition of a far more confident and ambitious foreign policy than the country had ever pursued before, the birth of American grand strategy in a strict sense—my essay most attracts charges of economic determinism: as if reducing, in Leffler's phrase, "Washington decision-makers to putty in the hands of nameless capitalists." The criticism, however, is based on a misreading of its object. For I distinguish, in general, the interests of capital from the interests of the state—*any* state in any society that can uncontroversially be described as capitalist—and I emphasize the exceptional nature of the disjuncture between them in the case of the United States. Should any reader doubt the force with which I express these positions, I will repeat what I wrote in "Imperium." As to the first, after pointing out the independent origins of capitalism as an economic system and the multiplicity of states in the feudal world into which it was born, ensuring that the two would never coincide, I described the structural reason for the subsequent tensions between them, even in a fully capitalist world, like this:

> On the one hand, states could not contradict the interests of capital without undermining themselves, since their power depended on the prosperity of an economy governed by the requirements of profitability. On the other hand,

1. Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (London, 1998) is a book I admire, with some reservations. See "Avoiding Hitler," *The Economist*, November 12, 1998.

2. See "Review Symposium," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* (October–November 1976): 47–64, with contributions by William Appleman Williams, Marc Blecher & Thomas Thompson, and Bruce Cumings.

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> the activities of states could not be subject to the same set of incentives and constraints as those of firms. For while the field of inter-state—like that of inter-firm—relations was also one of competition, it lacked either the institutional rules of a market or the transparency of a price mechanism for adjudicating claims of rationality or efficiency. There was no external counterpart to the internal settlement of the coordination problem [as Hayekians would term this]. The consequence was a continual risk of miscalculations and sub-optimal—at the limit, disastrous—outcomes for all contending parties (p. 40).[3]

The central place of Nicolas Spykman's political vision of the interstate system in my account of postwar developments might itself have served as a prophylactic against suspicions of undue economism.

As to the particular form that this structural differentiation between state and capital took in the United States, I made clear that it was just here that I dissented from straightforward Open Door interpretations of American expansionism, agreeing with its critics that in the time of McKinley or Wilson, the scale and dynamism of its domestic market, and the abundance of its resource endowment, were such that U.S. capitalism did not require ever larger overseas markets, with exports remaining a very small proportion of GDP. No other capitalist economy enjoyed this position, nor by mid-century, came anywhere near the United States in size. What this meant was that for post-war Washington

> a "preponderance of power" was not simply the standard objective of any major state—the pursuit, as Spykman put it, "not of an equilibrium, but a generous margin" of strength. Objectively, it had another meaning, rooted in the unique character of the US as a capitalist state not only encompassing by far the largest and most self-sufficient industrial economy in the world, but sheltering behind its oceans from any credible attack by rival or enemy. On the plane of *Weltpolitik* there thus emerged a wide gap between the potential power of the American state and the actual extent of American interests (pp. 41–42).

It was just this gap, I argued, that was the condition of American conduct of the Cold War. For it was then that

> the preponderance of American power over American interests became for the first time became fully functional, in the shape of an imperial hegemony. The US state would henceforward act, not primarily as a projection of the concerns of US capital, but as a guardian of the general interest of all capitals, sacrificing—where necessary, and for as long as needed—national gain for international advantage, in the confidence of ultimate pay-off. It could afford to do so, because after the war, as before it, the measure of American power—now not simply economic, but military and political—was still far in excess of the reach

3. Compare Leffler above: "What motivated American policy, according to Anderson, was the quest for markets and the interests of capital."

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> of American banks and corporations. There was a lot of slack available for the concessions to subaltern states, and their ruling groups, essential for the construction of a hegemonic system (p. 43).

This "latitude of American power over American interests" operated not only in the construction of allies during the Cold War, but also of enemies. Milne remarks that the Americanization of war in Vietnam cannot be reduced to a "tragic story of U.S. economic self-interest." Indeed. It reflected rather "the remit of the imperial state beyond the requirements of national capital," one that held still longer in the Third World than in the First, and is a central theme of "Imperium."

Milne adds that unstinting American support for Israel is another case that defies any logic of economic causation. I entirely agree. In fact, it forms a special case in the repertoire of U.S. foreign policy, because it answers neither to any interest of American capital, nor—and in this dual departure is unique—to any interest of the American state, rationally considered. Its determinant lies elsewhere, in the supervening influence of the Jewish community in the American political and cultural system, more divided now than in the past, but still ring-fencing policy towards Israel from considerations conventional in other theatres of operation. To say this is not an ad hoc concession on my part; I have written on several occasions to this effect.[4] In sum, the classification of economic reductionism can be returned with a polite *fin de non recevoir*. It does not apply. I have set out clearly how I believe the relations between capital and state in U.S. foreign policy should be conceived, and illustrated it. Have Leffler or Westad, whom Milne invokes, done so? I think any reasonable reader could ask of them: you concede the economy is not irrelevant, but say it is not determinant—what then is its role? Nothing very much, it would seem. As Westad puts it, in the end the lodestones of U.S. foreign policy remain that familiar pair, the quest for "freedom and security."

What then of the dangers to the United States from its enemies? For Miscamble and Leffler, these have been fundamental drivers of American foreign policy since the time of Roosevelt, and each expresses the utmost surprise and indignation that, as they believe, I should ignore them. Japanese aggression, Nazi racism and anti-semitism, Stalin's vile tyranny—how could I have disregarded these as the threats against which the United States was reacting, to the benefit of humanity? It is true that I said little about the first. But this was because I took it for granted that modern scholarship has shown how misleading any such portrayal of American stances towards Japanese expansionism in the Far East would be. It was Theodore Roosevelt after all, thrilled by Japanese victories at Mukden and Tsushima, who negotiated the Treaty of Portsmouth that sealed Japan's control of Korea and entrenched its troops in southern Manchuria. Thirty years later, Stimson viewed

4. See "Scurrying towards Bethlehem," *New Left Review* no. 10 (July–August 2001); and "Jottings on the Conjuncture," *New Left Review* no. 48 (November–December 2007).

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further Japanese advances on the mainland of Asia with alarm, bordering on consternation. Viewed from Tokyo, matters naturally looked rather differently. If the United States had swallowed half of Mexico, seized the Philippines, and annexed Hawaii, with no eyebrows raised from what today would be called the international community, on what grounds should it take umbrage at Japan, with far less natural resources at home, acting in similar style in China or Southeast Asia? Long ago, James Crowley showed that the outlook behind Japan's "quest for autonomy and security" was one that had been conventional among the empires whose ranks it sought to join, but—once these were satisfied powers, their own conquests and colonies safely under their belt—became, in their eyes, unheard-of aggression. That the Roosevelt administration, far from being a bewildered victim of unprovoked assault, pursued a course objectively heading into war with Japan requires no recourse to conspiracy theories. This was, after all, the burden of the first work by Paul Schroeder—who would go onto become the greatest living diplomatic historian, in America or beyond it—in *The Axis Alliance and Japanese-American Relations 1941*, which dates back to 1958.

FDR's policies were more sentimentally driven in the European than in the Asian theater of world politics. The First World War, in which he had been a Wilsonian zealot at the Navy, had left its mark. By the time he was firmly installed in the White House, his outlook was a compound of various, by no means always coherent, attitudes. In general, he was deeply distrustful, as John Lamberton Harper has brought home, of the Old World and its unregenerate ways, yet impressed at the same time with Mussolini, that "admirable Italian gentleman," holding a soft spot for Pétain, and helping Franco to victory in Spain. Germany, on the other hand, was in his eyes a country apart, stamped with the brand mark of the criminal—guilty of the Great War, as the Treaty of Versailles had solemnly proclaimed. Roosevelt's detestation of it remained undimmed across the succeeding decades. Not racism or antisemitism were movers of his attitude to the Third Reich. Though FDR had no liking for the Führer, his administration also had no compunction in repelling helpless Jewish refugees from Nazism from its shores, and when the war came, paid as little attention as Churchill's to the Judeocide. Hitler's expansionism—his "lust for domination" as Leffler puts it—was another matter. That, Roosevelt feared as a sequel to Ludendorff, and sought to rally his country against, succeeding beyond expectations with the by-blow accorded him in the Pacific.

American entry into the Second World War, as Robert Art has shown, was not—contrary to Spykman's calculations, and, of course, conventional belief at the time, and since—required to ensure the country's security. Had it kept aloof, even a Japanese victory in China and a German one in Europe would have left it master of a still impregnable, self-sufficient New World. But as Art has emphasized, this does not mean that U.S. belligerence was irrational, answering to no tangible national interest as in the First World War. For victory left the United States in command of advanced strategic positions and vital industrial resources that, in Europe at least, would otherwise have fallen to the Soviet Union, and could be

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turned against it.[5] This is the point at which, in the outlook to which Miscamble and Leffler give eloquent voice, America woke to find itself confronted with the most dangerous of all the totalitarian foes it would face in the twentieth century—the most ruthless in striking at the foundation of any free society in private property, and the most universal in its chilling appeal. How, they ask, could I have failed to say anything about the political enormity of the Stalinist regime in Moscow, and the threat it posed to democracy round the world, to which U.S. foreign policy must be understood as a necessary response?

Commenting on "Imperium," Miscamble or Leffler was not called upon to look beyond it. Had they done so, however, they would have seen that I am not unaware of Stalin's crimes, or the nature of the regime over which he presided, about which I have written elsewhere.[6] But it is far from the case, as a glance at "Imperium" makes clear, that I either ignored or downplayed the menace that the USSR configured for Washington after 1945. For the purposes of a study of American foreign policy, the two most relevant features of the Soviet Union were its combination of a fundamentally defensive posture after 1945, as a power that was far weaker than the United States and knew it, and an ultimately offensive horizon, as a system bent in the long run on the elimination of the world of capital. To both I give full emphasis. In my judgement, it is this duality that much of even the best historiography of the Cold War misses. Revisionism has characteristically insisted on cautious self-preservation as the keynote of Russian foreign policy after the ordeal of Operation Barbarossa, orthodoxy on apocalyptic self-expansion as the genetic code of Communism from the foundation of the Third International onwards—the threat still confidently repeated by Khrushchev at the United Nations: "We will bury you." In this division, each side tends to dismiss as feint or rhetoric what the other underscores—if Stalin was committed to the destruction of capitalism, his foreign policy cannot have been defensive; if his foreign policy was defensive, talk of world revolution cannot have been more than lip service.

A not so dissimilar pattern can be seen, conversely, in debates over the nature of the American stance in the Cold War: was it prudent, self-limiting containment whose aim was simply to halt Soviet expansion, or was its underlying objective bolder and more far-sighted—the downfall of the USSR, and liberation of the peoples enslaved by it? Here too the dynamic was never single; it was always double edged. No one has captured the ensuing dual nature of the conflict that became the

5. "The United States, the Balance of Power and World War II. Was Spykman Right?" in *America's Grand Strategy and World Politics*, ed. Robert Art (New York, 2009), 69–106. For an earlier argument, on rather different grounds that would not have met Art's conclusion, see Bruce Russett, *No Clear and Present Danger: A Sceptical View of the United States' Entry into World War II* (New York, 1972).

6. For example, "Two Revolutions," *New Left Review* no. 61 (January–February 2010).

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Cold War better than Anders Stephanson.[7] It was at once strategic—a set of calculations as to where geopolitical and military advantage might lie and ontological—an existential struggle to death in which each side sought the ruin of the other, and could end alone with the victory of the stronger.

The Cold War, however, was only one, prolonged phase in the construction of the American imperial system of today. Leffler's magisterial study of it in the time of Truman took as the leitmotif of American grand strategy the need for U.S. "preponderance." That was required, he now explains, to ensure that the resources of Eurasia did not fall under Communist control, jeopardizing—so officials in Washington reckoned—America's "political economy of freedom." In "Imperium," I noted that Leffler's genealogy of preponderance remained ambiguous—it was driven, he wrote, by fear and power, without indication of which might be the more significant. Writing today, twenty years later, the ambiguity has dropped away. The quest for preponderance was defensive: motivated by fear for the American way of life. But if this was so, the obvious question is posed: when the Soviet Union disappeared, and with it any communist danger—the expropriation of the expropriators of old—to the political economy of freedom, did that mean the United States gave up its drive for preponderance? Manifestly, it did not. Far from contracting, preponderance expanded into a global hegemony. What propelled this further development: was it really still fright? That the query answers itself can be seen from Leffler's remark that today "the hegemonic role of the United States must be relegitimized."[8] Fear will no longer do. The formulation is, in its fashion, a kind of admission. The legitimations of preponderance—the Red menace and the rest—were one thing. Its motivations were another. The continuity of American foreign policy may be symbolized by the arc of an acronym, from the Act engineered by Forrestal to the Agency exposed by Snowden. But it is a product of the dictates of empire, not of the tremolos of security.

Continuity of ends has always consorted with variability of means. A major alteration in the latter came with Nixon, the one genuine innovator of his line, as Bacevich observes. The criterion for adoption of one weapon or another in the armory of U.S. strategy remains, as in the past, pragmatic: will it be effective? Effects are often not easy to calculate *ex ante*, and there have been a number of famous miscalculations. But of the overall balance sheet there can scarcely be much doubt. In a mysterious passage, Leffler ascribes the antithesis of my judgement to me. "Imperium" is not a catalogue of American failures but largely of successes. Setbacks there have, of course, been in the pursuit of world power. But these have been offset or surmounted in the general tally of advances. American paramountcy is not invulnerable. But if it is now paradoxically at risk from the very sweep of its

7. See "Fourteen Notes on the Very Concept of the Cold War," in *Rethinking Geopolitics*, eds. Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby (London, 1998); "Kennan: Realism as Desire" in *The Invention of International Relations Theory*, ed. Nicolas Guilhot (New York, 2011).

8. "9/11 and the Past and Future of American Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 79 (October 2003): 1062–63; cited in "Consilium," 118.

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victories, more than its defeats, that exposure is recent, and offers no warrant for the belief that "US primacy has been a disaster for Americans." On the whole, if unequally, they have done pretty well out of it. Naturally, the world is another matter. That it has been a grateful beneficiary of American imperial power is an article for faith for most thinkers in the United States, forming one of the themes of "Consilium."[9] Plainly, as Elizabeth Cobbs-Hoffman has noticed, I do not share it.

It is within this general reckoning that, from the opposite standpoint of a radical historiography of the American empire, Marilyn Young and Andrew Bacevich take issue with particular assessments of mine. After correctly picking me up on a careless reference to Korea as Japan's first colony, Young observes that the destruction of communism in Indonesia could not alter the domestic impact of America's defeat in Vietnam, which is understated in my account. She is right. She also questions my portrait of Kennan. While conceding that his views were "all over the place," she would still enlist him as essentially a voice of sanity in his modest conception of the place of the United States in world affairs, and distance from any emotional anticommunism. That is certainly the customary view of Kennan. But while it corresponds to the self-image he wanted to project when he published the first volume of his memoirs in the late sixties, it is at variance with his actual performance in Washington at the National War College and Policy Planning in the State Department, a record which he sought to obscure after he lost office. That he was rarely consistent does not mean there was no predominating pattern in his pronouncements of this period. "Imperium" documents the range and radicalism of his interventions—from Southern Europe to Latin America, Southeast Asia to West Africa, the Middle East to the China Sea—as a global Cold Warrior of feverish intensity. Over time, bureaucratic exile modified his outlook. But it is well to remember that even out of office he signed up to an invasion of Cuba in 1960, and could urge an attack on Iran not only in 1954 but also in 1980.

The Middle East is another zone of contention. With some justice, Miscamble points out that it is hard to square my verdict, that the Yom Kippur War left the U.S. diplomatic master of the region, with the oil embargo triggered by Saudi Arabia in response to it. That certainly needed unpacking. The embargo itself was short-lived—lifted within six months, and its architect Faisal gunned down in Riyadh a year later. If in that sense mastery was not quite so immediate as I implied, no Saudi ruler has ever committed a comparable act of defiance since. Bacevich raises a yet weightier objection. The war in Iraq, he argues, cannot be described as any kind of victory merely because it incurred no military rout. In destroying the

9. Outraged by a comparative balance sheet of the United States and Soviet record, from the time of Kennedy to that of Reagan, in their respective zones of control in Central America and Eastern Europe, Miscamble attributes it to myself. In fact, as any reader of "Imperium" can see, it was written by John Coatsworth of Columbia, not known as an apologist for Stalin, and comes from his contribution to the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol III, eds. Leffler and Westad, (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 220–21.

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American reputation for invincibility, it put paid U.S. claims to hegemony in the region, where it is now strategically irrelevant. Reflecting on his judgement, and the authority behind it, I conclude he is right that I overstated my view. But I wonder if he has not done something similar. The new borderless air war launched by Obama—another notch up in the lawless exercise of an imperial presidency—at the head of an array of Arab client states, no doubt brigading Turkey too, may fall short of its objectives.[10] But could it be irrelevant to the fate of the region?

A final word about "Consilium." In prefacing it, as Wilson Miscamble recalls, I drew a distinction, though their fields of interest overlap, between diplomatic historians and policy-driven strategists. David Milne adds that my approach to the latter is that of an intellectual historian. The symposium has reminded me of the difference between these two types of history. Their requirements—roughly speaking: empirical mastery of archives and sense of political realities in the one, and analytic care with the detail of texts and ability to interrelate them in the other—may be combined but do not perforce coincide. Such contrasts could be multiplied across the historical field as a whole. No other discipline is so varied in its forms and approaches, each with its own validity—none as such better than any other. In this case, as should be clear from what I have written above, I have been struck by the divergence between the particular pair in question here. Diplomatic historians of the caliber of Leffler and Miscamble are landmarks of archival erudition. Our political outlooks differ, obviously enough. But I have learned a great deal from both, as the references in "Imperium" show. Accurate reading of contemporary texts is another kind of discipline, and experience has taught me that the finest social or economic, as well as political or diplomatic, historians are not always at home in what for intellectual historians is a *sine qua non*. This was first made clear to me, if I may be allowed a personal reminiscence, in an exchange with the eminent historian of the English working class, Edward Thompson, half a century ago. But something similar could be said of a subsequent debate with Pierre Nora, the French historian of *Lieux de mémoire*, or the reception of a recent text on the subcontinent by Indian historians.[11] The value of each such experience has always been greater than the confusions of an incidental mismatch. So it has been in this case too. If I allude to the pattern, it is simply to explain why the object of "Consilium," the complement to "Imperium," would have been less likely to command the interest of a diplomatic than an intellectual historian. Melvyn Leffler judges it labored. If he can guide me to nimbler ones, I will be abashed.

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10. See Bacevich's striking survey of American policy and prospects in the larger Middle East "Even if We Defeat the Islamic State, We'll Still Lose the Bigger War," *Washington Post*, October 3, 2013.

11. For reflections on the first of these occasions, see *English Questions* (London/New York, 1992), 4–6 and *Spectrum* (London/New York, 2005), 178–79; for the second, see *La pensée tiède* (Paris 2005) and *Le nouveau vieux monde* (Marseille, 2011), 245–48; for the third, *The Indian Ideology* (Delhi, 2012) and responses in *Seminar*, *Social Scientist*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, etc. All three involved patriotic susceptibilities, in that respect perhaps not unlike this one.

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